

Senator Stevens' Statement on Port Security

“As we all know, Monday marks the fifth anniversary of September 11th and the terrorist attacks against this country. Shortly after these attacks, the President signed into law the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002, which was developed by our Commerce Committee and greatly enhanced our country's maritime security efforts. Since then, our Commerce Committee has worked to pass and implement a number of initiatives which have made our ports and borders more secure.

“Today we will take up the Port Security Improvement Act of 2006. This bill marks the first time three Senate committees have merged their collective expertise and crafted a truly comprehensive approach to port security. A bipartisan group of members from the Commerce Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee have worked together for several months on this bill. I know the Senate will realize these three committees each have tremendous knowledge about our ports and the programs which protect and secure our international supply chain. I believe it is a credit to the Senate that each committee agreed to pool their resources, put aside jurisdictional issues, and reach consensus on this bill.

“When enacted, the bill will strengthen security at our land and sea ports, improve our maritime transportation security strategy, and enhance communications between the Department of Homeland Security and transportation security stakeholders. It includes a plan to get our trade activities up and running again in the event of a transportation security incident. And it creates a pilot program which will study the feasibility of scanning each of the containers – 100 percent of the containers – entering our ports.

“I have spent considerable time in the last couple of years examining our ports, especially those on the West Coast, which I know best. The Port of Los Angeles which is really three separate ports, is made up of the ports of San Pedro, Long Beach and Los Angeles. This is an enormous, enormous area. At least thirty percent of the nation's sea borne trade comes through the Port of Los Angeles. The Port of Seattle, which is a stepping stone into my state of Alaska, is a dynamic port which is has been experimenting to a great extent with how to bring about continuing inspection of container scanning. I have personally been through each of those ports to see what was being done. There is still a great many problems, but I must say people operating these ports, including those who are really the working people of the ports have gone out of their way to make certain that our ports are safe and secure and that the containers are in fact scanned. We want through this pilot program as soon possible to have one hundred percent of the containers in this country scanned.

“This legislation will enhance the collection and analysis of information about cargo destined for our ports. Those in the shipping industry are our eyes and ears, and this bill

aims to increase awareness of the operations at domestic and foreign ports. Once those in industry share important information about cargo in the international supply chain, we must analyze it quickly. This legislation expedites that process and ensures it begins even earlier in the supply chain – before containers even reach our shores. This Act requires information about cargo be provided and analyzed before the cargo is loaded on a vessel in a foreign port and shipped to our country. That will be a significant change.

“This bill also expands several initiatives with a proven track record of success. There are currently five interagency operation centers set up and running throughout our country. These centers bring together federal, state, and local security enforcement officials to ensure communication among them. Our Act expands this effort to each of the major seaports, and places the Coast Guard in charge of oversight of these centers.

“This bill builds upon the Department of Homeland Security’s past cooperation with foreign governments. The Container Security Initiative (CSI) contained within this bill will enable the Department, working in partnership with host government customs services, to examine high-risk containerized cargo at foreign seaports before it is loaded on vessels destined for the United States.

“Another item in this bill is the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT), a voluntary public-private partnership, is also strengthened in this bill. The Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection will now be able to certify that a business’s supply chain is secure from the point of manufacture to the product’s final U.S. destination. Under this legislation, whether cargo crosses our border at Laredo or arrives on a ship from Hong Kong, participating companies’ supply chains will undergo a thorough security check from the beginning to the end. This will add another layer of security to the C-TPAT initiative. Since this is a voluntary system, we have also included provisions which encourage those in industry to go above and beyond the security requirements already in place. These new incentives include expedited clearance of cargo.

“I was disappointed by the public reaction to foreign investment in our port terminals, we learned a great deal from hearings held by the Commerce Committee on the matter, and as a result the bill requires the backgrounds of all port personnel to be vetted by the Department of Homeland Security. Current law requires the Transportation Security Administration to perform checks only for those workers directly tied to transportation at the port – for example truck drivers and longshoremen. From the Commerce Committee hearings, it was evident that a more stringent requirement was needed, and it is in this bill.

“The events of September 11th, 2001, forever altered the course of our nation. We all know and realize that. I am not sure the Senate knows that Senator Inouye and I traveled to Ground Zero shortly after the attacks. It was a terrible and sad sight. It was also a stark

reminder that we must do everything possible to prevent those who wish to harm Americans from carrying out their missions. To prevent future attacks, it is necessary to secure our ports. And this bill is a major step forward in this effort. Senator Inouye, my co-chairman on the Commerce Committee, and I thank Senators Grassley, Baucus, Collins and Lieberman, and I would also like to thank the staff members on each of the committees – they have worked tirelessly on this bill.

“Each of the Committees involved in this bill has jurisdiction over an area vital to the safety of our ports. The Commerce Committee oversees issues related to the shipping industry, transportation security, and the Coast Guard. The Finance Committee oversees international trade and customs. Greater security of our ports and borders is central to the Homeland Security Committee’s mission. Working together, our three committees have developed a comprehensive bill which we hope will help shield our nation from future terrorist attacks. It is my hope our colleagues will support this Act and move quickly to pass this bill.”

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